

SITUATION REPORT NO. 3
INCIDENT NO. 97-015
DATE: MARCH 24, 1997 TIME: 1:00 P.M.

TO: Governor Edward T. Schafer
State Capitol
Bismarck, ND 58505

1. NATURE OF DISASTER: Spring flood statewide.
2. DEATHS AND INJURIES: No change from the previous report.
3. DAMAGES: In southwestern North Dakota, rapid snowmelt runoff and ice jams caused flooding during the March 21-23 weekend along the Cannonball, Knife and Heart Rivers and their tributaries. This flooding has forced the evacuation of more than 200 families in Hettinger, Mercer, Morton, and Sioux Counties. Roads in many areas remain impassable because of rising waters.

Weekend temperatures ranged in the mid-40s in southwestern North Dakota, which kept rivers running high, although freezing temperatures at night slowed runoff. Gusty winds aided the thawing of the snow. In eastern North Dakota, temperatures ranged from the mid-20s to the mid-30s.

Winter-like weather returned to south central and southeastern North Dakota late March 23 and early March 24 when a snow storm moved into the area. The National Weather Service expects up to five inches of snow, with heaviest accumulations occurring in the southeast, between Jamestown and Fargo.

The snow pack remains intact in eastern North Dakota, including the Devils Lake Basin. At present, the lake is still frozen and runoff has not yet begun. The forecast still calls for the lake to rise to 1,440.5 feet MSL by July 1997.

Weekend flood damages first occurred on March 21 in Hettinger County when an ice jam on the Cannonball River caused flooding in western Mott, forcing the evacuation of 50 families. At the time flooding occurred, the river level reached 21.6 feet in Regent, eight miles northwest of Mott. Flood stage is 22 feet. The river level has since receded to 11.2 feet on March 24, and water levels in Mott have dropped six feet. The Weather Service has canceled its flood warning for Hettinger County.

The Cannonball River continues to flow out of its banks farther southeast in Grant and Sioux Counties, requiring the Weather Service to continue its flood warnings for those areas.

In Sioux County, flooding on the Cannonball River forced the evacuation of three families in the Solen area and one in the Shields area. The Shields family home was completely inundated early March 24 by flood waters, which also knocked over a telephone pole. The family was rescued after they were spotted by a passing motorist.

The largest evacuation of people took place in Mercer County when 150 Beulah residents fled their homes late March 22 and early March 23 after the Knife River flooded the southern part of the city. Mercer County officials used front-end loaders and boats to evacuate residents. Sewer lines backed up, and lift stations were inundated. Up to four feet of water still stands on streets, lawns and pasture land, although waters are beginning to recede.

Officials closed N.D. Highway 49 as a result of the flooding. They planned to reopen the road at noon on March 24.

Knife River flooding also forced the evacuation of two farm families south of Golden Valley.

The Weather Service reported that the level of the Knife River near Hazen reached 26.9 feet on March 23, up 3.5 feet from the previous day. Flood stage is 21 feet; the flood of record is 27 feet set in 1966.

The Weather Service began issuing flood warning statements on March 22 for cities bordering the Heart River after local runoff and ice jams forced water to spill out of the banks. The Big Muddy and Antelope Creeks have also been contributing to the rise in the river.

West of the city of Dickinson, an ice jam caused an explosion of water to rush downstream on the Green River, a tributary of the Heart River.

In Stark County, local runoff to Patterson Lake required operators of the Patterson Dam to increase outflows to maintain control of the dam. These releases required three Dickinson homeowners to place sandbags around their homes.

The Heart River west of Mandan peaked at 24.1 feet during the evening of March 22, but had dropped to 19.3 feet by March 23. Flood stage is 17 feet.

Along Antelope Creek, another tributary of the Heart River, an ice jam forced the evacuation of farmers when rising flood water filled their farm yards.

Lake Tschida in Grant County is full to the point where water is flowing into the lake's glory hole, resulting in a maximum release from the lake pool. At this point, the pool level will rise pending the inflows from Stark County.

In northwest North Dakota, breakup of ice jams on the Yellowstone River, which feeds into the Missouri River, caused the Missouri River at Williston to swell to 23.6 feet, creating lowland flooding. Flood stage is 20 feet.

The N.D. Division of Emergency Management has received many reports from southwestern counties, where roads are under water because existing drainage systems cannot handle the additional water.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: No change from the first report.

STATE: No change from the first report.

FEDERAL: No change from the first report.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTIONS: The American Red Cross provided shelter to four Mott families affected by flooding. Others evacuated from their homes found shelter with relatives and friends. The St. Vincent Catholic Church also opened its convent for housing of evacuees.

The Salvation Army is providing cleanup kits to the 50 Mott families affected by flooding.

A group of community volunteers from Mott provided meals for evacuees and flood fighters at the Knights of Columbus hall.

In Mercer County, volunteers conducted search and rescue response to the evacuation in Beulah. The Red Cross has established a shelter at the Beulah middle school for housing of evacuees unable to stay with relatives or friends.

6. MAJOR ACTIONS: Governor Schafer conducted a meeting on March 21 to review the State Emergency Operations Plan with cabinet-level state agencies in preparation for the flood response.

Governor Schafer issued an Executive Order on March 21 that allows for a waiver of dike permit requirements, although North Dakotans are required to abide by safety standards when constructing emergency temporary dikes. The waiver extends through June 30.

Col. John Wonsik, District Engineer for the St. Paul District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), on March 21 briefed the Governor, the Adjutant General, the N.D. State Water Commission state engineer and N.D. Division of Emergency Management acting state director.

The North Dakota Civil Air Patrol attempted a surveillance flight of Cannonball and Heart Rivers on March 23, but low-lying clouds required the air crew to postpone the mission.

The Division of Emergency Management staff assisted the city of Beulah in obtaining additional pumps from the N.D. Game and Fish Department and the N.D. State Water Commission.

The city of Linton has requested the USACE to provide pumps, sandbags and technical assistance in anticipation of flooding in the Beaver Creek area. That area has flooded in past years.

The USACE has begun flood preparedness work in Fargo, Fort Ransom, Harwood and Wahpeton. Plans for advanced measures in the cities of Lisbon, Enderlin, Grafton, Grand Forks and Pembina are now being developed by the USACE in St. Paul. These missions call for flood preparedness measures to include assistance in constructing levees, securing sandbags and pumps, and providing technical assistance.

The USACE's Omaha District decreased releases from the Garrison Dam from 20,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 9,000 cfs to allow tributaries to drain into the Missouri River.

The Morton County Highway Department has steamed open culverts to facilitate draining of spring runoff.

The Mercer County Highway Department and Emergency Services Office have barricaded inundated roads

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: None at this time.
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: No change from previous reports.
9. OTHER: The Weather Service will issue the next "Spring Snowmelt Flood Outlook" on March 28.

The N.D. Division of Emergency Management's Situation Reports for the spring flood, Devils Lake flood and winter storm are posted on the Division's Internet home page. The address is: "<http://www.state.nd.us/dem>".

Raymond J. Staiger, Acting State Director